

What Makes a Great Workforce Planner?

Findings from a global study of practitioners



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Abstract

Many organizations are discovering that a 12-18 month headcount plan is insufficient for solving the talent changes they are experiencing or anticipating in the future. Every organization is heading towards a future influenced by current trends and practices, and by social trends such as skills shortages, globalization, the aging workforce and increasing demands for work/life balance. Many organizations sense that this will create significant future workforce challenges, but don't have the framework to ensure that their future workforce is the one they need. This framework is Strategic Workforce Planning.

Strategic Workforce Planning is an important part of developing a complete business strategy, and the need is increasing due to new complex workforce challenges. Failure to workforce plan will create major productivity and profitability challenges in the next five years – while the workforce is shrinking, the global market for talent is growing and the skills and knowledge of the aging workforce cannot be easily replaced.

While many organizations struggle to implement Strategic Workforce Planning, even when a variety of approaches are available, a growing number are reporting great successes in the area. With this in mind, Aruspex sought to research the activities, skills and qualities which differentiate the successful Strategic Workforce Planners – not just to discover what they are doing, but to provide practical guidance on how to improve.

This research confirms a dichotomy in workforce planning approaches – a major difference in the skills, qualities and outlook of those who are succeeding in Strategic Workforce Planning compared to those focusing on (and succeeding in) headcount planning. Strategic Workforce Planners focus on scenario planning, forecasting capability growth and decline, deeply understanding the business, and environment scanning, where Operational Workforce Planners include data collation in their top three activities.

As well as focusing on the activities of the two types of workforce planning, the study considered the current and desired future skills and experience of practitioners, as well as their personal qualities. Having skills in HR was surprisingly low, eclipsed by data analysis, the core business of the organization and strategic planning, among others. In terms of qualities, practitioners most valued being analytical, resilient and driven; and sought to become better at sales, negotiation and creativity – not numbers based skills!

Overall it seems that the workforce planning community is moving effectively beyond the numbers to a strategic planning approach. There are strong signals of executive support and of success, but there are significant challenges and obstacles, including data, executive focus and having no “best practice” to follow. 55% of respondents stated that workforce planning was one of HR's top three priorities.

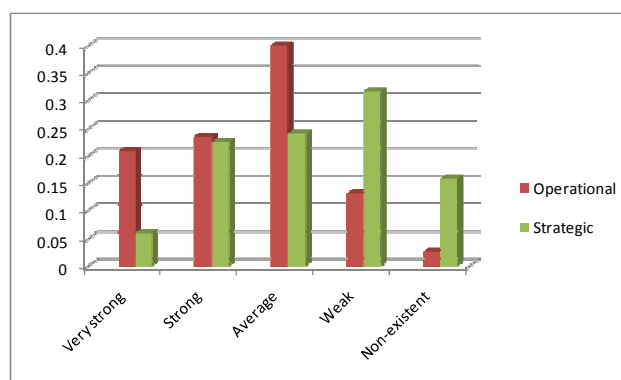
This report describes the details of this study, including four case studies of practitioners implementing Strategic Workforce Planning. The tips which respondents and case studies have shared will be a valuable resource for those on the “journey” to Strategic Workforce Planning, and Aruspex are proud to present them.

Strategic vs. Operational Workforce Planning

This research was designed to understand what makes a great workforce planner and how they make the transition from operational workforce planning to strategic workforce planning. To clarify:

OPERATIONAL workforce planning (OWFP) is a process which builds a staffing plan - ie calculates how many people the organization needs to hire (usually for the next 12 months), and how much it will cost. The outputs are a staffing plan and staffing budget.

STRATEGIC workforce planning (SWFP) is a longer term process which involves exploring the future, defining the right workforce (qualitatively as well as with the numbers) for the organization's success. The outputs are a description of the future workforce, and a measurable HR strategy to achieve it.



Respondents' self assessed strength in SWFP is clearly behind that in OWFP. 48% of respondents rated their SWFP capability as weak or nonexistent, but only 16% felt the same for their OWFP capability. 44% rated their OWFP strong or very strong, against only 29% for SWFP. Both types of workforce

planning are clearly valuable, but many more organizations are performing operational planning than strategic planning. We asked questions about both kinds in this research, but the main focus was on discovering how practitioners succeed at SWFP.

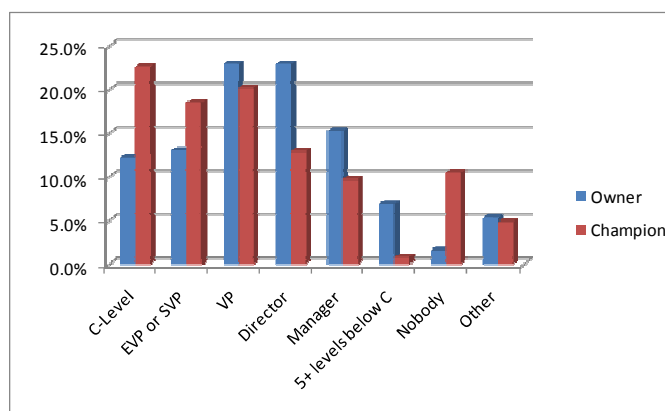
Findings from the Study

Accountability for Workforce Planning in the Organization

SWFP sponsorship is spread fairly evenly across the top three levels of the organization, but the actual accountability tends toward VP or Director level (3-4 levels below the C-level). Only 1.5% of respondents stated nobody was responsible for SWFP, but 10% stated they had no champion or sponsor in the organization.

Note that when we viewed only the responses of those organizations self-assessing as strong or very strong in their SWFP capability, both of these accountabilities were a full step higher. In these organizations, 32% had a C-Level sponsor, and in 76% the sponsor was in the top three levels of the organization. For those with strength in OWFP, 27%

had a C-Level sponsor for SWFP, and 72% had that sponsor in the top three levels, a slightly lower degree of executive focus.



When this comparison is made for ownership of the initiative, the difference is starker. For those rating strong or very strong in SWFP, only 16% had accountability four levels or more below the C-Level. In those rating strongly in OWFP, though, 27% stated this was true. This reflects a pattern of

organizations identifying that OWFP, while valuable, is insufficient for engaging the organization's top executives, and it is SWFP that senior levels of the organization claim ownership.

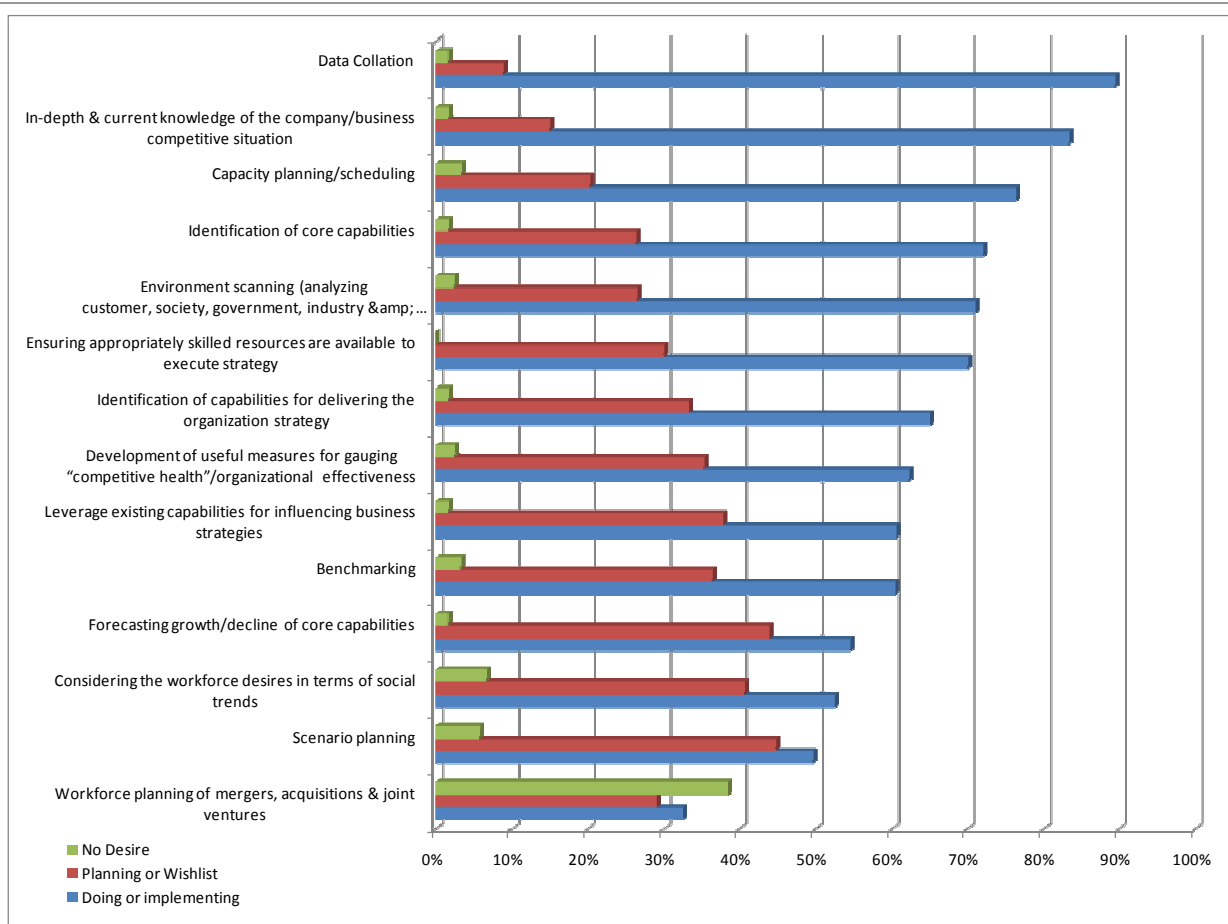
Note these were not mutually exclusive groups. Of those in the strong or very strong SWFP group, 52% also claimed strength in OWFP. However, of the OWFP strong/very strong group, only 30% also claimed strength in SWFP. This implies that the evolution beyond OWFP to SWFP does not require mastery in OWFP first.

The high level of existence of accountability is due to the focus of the research – people with no accountability are far less likely to be interested in participating in research on what makes a practitioner successful, so we do not consider this sample to be fully representative of all organizations. Rather, this is a sample of the views inside organizations which are focusing on SWFP to some degree

Activities, Strengths, Challenges

SWFP is a menu, not a prescription, and as an emerging discipline, it is important to explore what activities are in place and working for practitioners, and which they seek to implement. The research survey offered fourteen major SWFP activities and asked participants to describe the status of their efforts – performing more than one year, less than one year, implementing now, planning to implement, on the wish-list, or no desire to implement.

Unsurprisingly, 75% of people were already doing "data collation", and a further 15% were in the process of implementing their data collation approach. For most other activities, at least 50% of participants were either currently performing or implementing the activity.



When asked to identify the top three items which were most impactful to the business, the overall results were:

1. Ensuring appropriately skilled resources are available to execute strategy
2. Identification of capabilities for delivering the organization strategy
3. Data Collation

However, when the responses were restricted to those who rated their organizations as "strong" or "very strong" on Strategic Workforce Planning, the results were:

1. In-depth & current knowledge of the company/business competitive situation
2. Ensuring appropriately skilled resources are available to execute strategy
3. Environment Scanning

In this group "Data Collation" slipped to fifth rating. This indicates a transition from operational to strategic thinking – essentially away from a focus on data and the current state, to a longer term view of the organization's needs and an in depth understanding of the business.

Other Named Activities

Development pipelines

Analysis of barriers to joining the organization

Analysis of age profiles and retirement risk

Segmentation to priority skill groups

Redesigning highly skilled jobs to enable lower skilled workers to participate

Development and rollout of a strategic framework

Engaging staff and embedding the process

Regular meetings

Plans with varied horizons

Working closely with the business

Risk assessment

Developing credible analytics

New competency framework

Aligning HR KPI's to business strategy

Responses also varied according to what activities the organization was already doing – those who had been doing Scenario Planning in excess of one year (only 11% of respondents) considered Scenario Planning and Identification of Core Capabilities to be equal second in importance behind ensuring appropriately skilled resources to deliver the strategy. Those who have been considering the workforce in terms of social trends agreed. This indicates that those who have solid experience with the more powerful and yet qualitative aspects of SWFP are experiencing their value, while those who have not used them have yet to perceive that they *could* have significant impact. This research should help to illustrate that potential!

While most of the activities had only a small representation on the “no desire to include” list, 38% of respondents stated that about “Workforce Planning for Mergers, Acquisitions and Joint Ventures”. The need to focus on M&A is a very specific one, and it is not surprising that this many marked this, especially as the public sector was represented well in the research.

When asked for other activities in Workforce Planning that weren't listed respondents included the list drawn out at left.

Most of these were identified as being wish list items, indicating that while the respondents thought them desirable they did not have actual implementation plans.

One strong theme which came through in the free text responses was that implementation was not always consistent across the organization:

- “Inconsistent across the business, some areas are quite strategic and some are barely operational in their workforce planning”
- “Not all areas of workforce covered by same detail of planning - some nonexistent”
- “Now need to roll it out across the business”

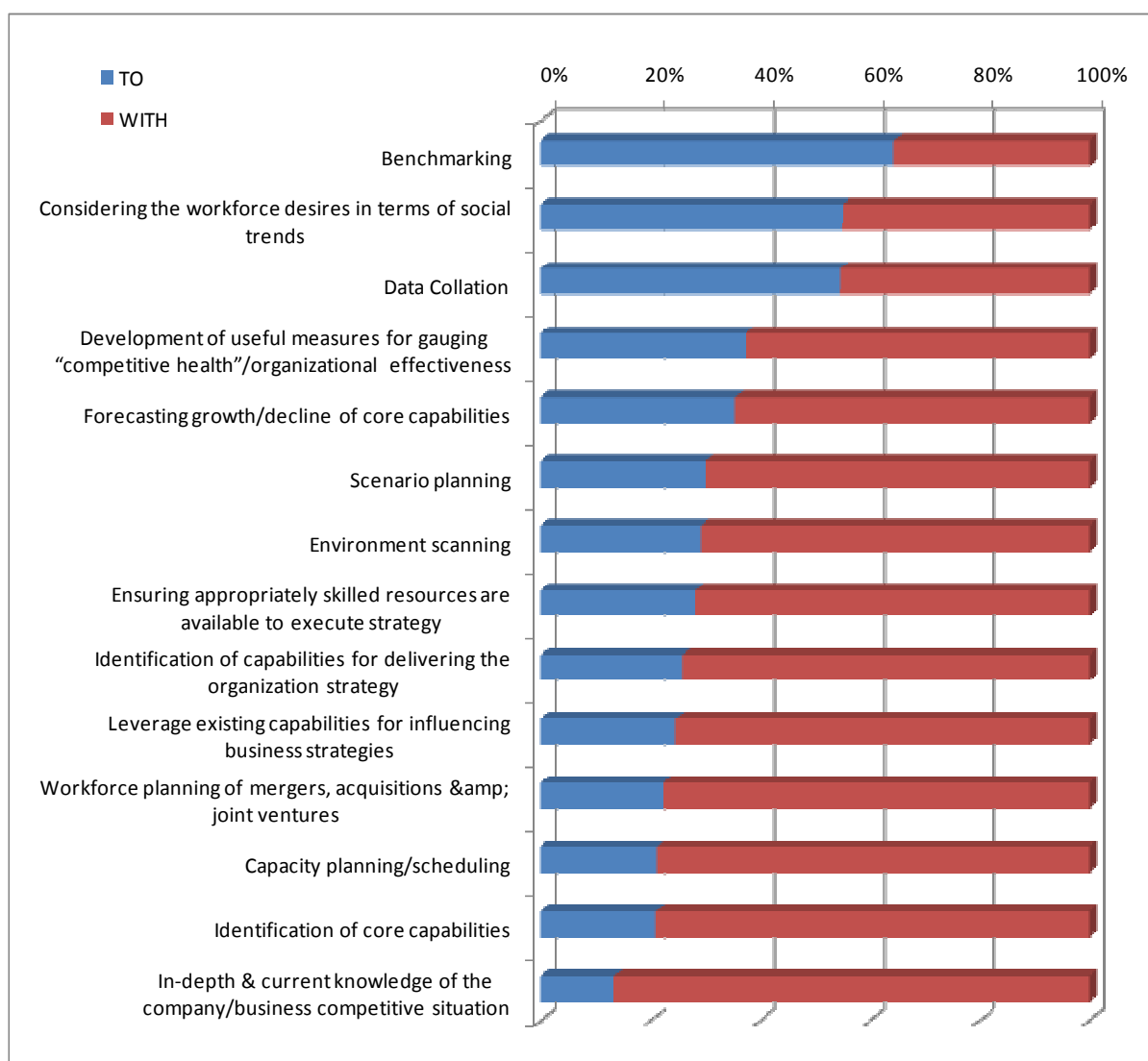
This is typical of emerging disciplines.

For the Business, or With the Business?

The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they saw these activities as being performed by HR for delivery to the business, or as being performed by HR and the business together. The only three items which the majority of respondents felt they were delivering TO the business rather than developing WITH the business were:

1. Benchmarking
2. Data Collation
3. Considering the workforce desires in terms of social trends

This means that for all other activities, workforce planning teams are developing their work with the business, which shows an excellent level of engagement. This is an excellent sign, and indicative of organizations whose HR and workforce planning practices are sophisticated enough to be moving towards SWFP.



Priorities for the Future

The top three items which respondents planned or wished to include in their SWPF efforts were:

1. Scenario planning (45%)
2. Forecasting growth/decline of core capabilities (44%)
3. Considering the workforce desires in terms of social trends (41%)

The third, though, was much more heavily placed as a “wishlist” item than the others. When combined with the fact that almost half of respondents considered this an item that is delivered to the business, there is an inference that HR are keen to make this a key part of SWFP, but that a lack of information and lack of buy-in from the business are hampering implementation.

Scenario Planning was also primarily a wishlist item, but this is more likely due to lack of internal skills than to resistance from the business, as it is a widely used business practice.

Obstacles and Challenges

When asked “What are the challenges you have faced? Choose a maximum of three”, respondents gave these responses:

Answer Options	Response Percent
We have too many fires to fight to focus on this	38.1%
We don't have the data we need	35.6%
Not enough people are dedicated to workforce planning	33.9%
We are on the journey!	33.1%
We are focusing on embedding operational planning first	30.5%
Strategic workforce planning is not a priority for us	25.4%
We are not focused on the future	23.7%
There is no “best practice” for us to follow	23.7%
We have no budget	22.0%
We lack the internal capability	19.5%
Analysis paralysis - swamped by data	13.6%

3 themes emerged in the other challenges and obstacles named by respondents:

- Engagement at the right level – an inability of the workforce planners to effectively involve leaders, managers and/or practitioners at the right level/s of the organization to the project
- Organizational readiness (including prioritizing) – a lack of cultural focus on the future and proactivity
- Workforce capability and tools

Examples of responses in each of these themes include:

Engagement at the right level

- “The champions for strategic workforce planning are not high enough in the organization, the C's and Directors talk a good line but don't walk the talk. The operational managers who can see the train coming down the tunnel can't seem to get the leaders focused on a longer term strategy”

“The champions for strategic workforce planning are not high enough in the organization, the C's and Directors talk a good line but don't walk the walk”

"My manager doesn't see it as a priority for me to work on strategic workforce planning. They are here for the short term and want short term wins"

- "Persuading 'on the floor' staff to take part in the planning process and to look at redesign rather than 'we need more staff'"
- "Large organization where executive management understands and supports efforts, however senior and middle management are not engaged and subsequently focus on operational workforce planning"
- "My manager doesn't see it as a priority for me to work on strategic workforce planning. they are here for the short term and want short term wins"
- "In healthcare, the dynamics are such that the clinicians call the shots. Invariably, after all those years of medical training, workforce planning seems an alien concept to them. They're always focused on the operational aspects of staffing"
- "Strategic workforce planning needs to occur at both an enterprise and industry wide level to be most successful, but getting all key players to work together is challenging"

Note that different respondents experienced lack of engagement at different levels – some are striving to increase executive level management, some middle and line management, some technical experts. For each organization, the right level will vary, but engaging the highest levels is essential.

Organizational Readiness

"We have been working towards this goal for a few years now. It is a major shift for our organization"

- "We have been working towards this goal for a few years now. It is a major shift for our organization. We have had to put in place new information systems which we are still refining and are working on collecting some of the data required. It is a priority and there is much work to be done."
- "Organization still very reactionary"
- "Varies between BUs but no obvious coordination from Corporate Unit"
- "The idea of being proactive instead of reactive is just taking hold for us. We are at the very beginning of trying to get everyone on the same page and moving in the same direction"

Workforce Planning capability and tools

- "If workforce planning was easy, everyone would be doing it!"
- "Main challenges for me are lack of future focus and not having tried & tested methodologies/tools"
- "HR Planning not institutionalized, inadequate experience and capability to drive HR Planning"

"Very present focused organization and skills and capabilities of HR partners are not core to supporting SWFP"

- "I need the cash to purchase a reasonably priced workforce analysis/planning tool. Patience....for now I am working with the data I can easily access and creating my own data warehouse. It's all good!"
- "Very present focused organization and skills and capabilities of HR partners are not core to supporting SWFP"
- "Lack of innovative and creative thinking to consider all possibilities"

In spite of the challenges, the overall mood of the responses was optimistic – for example "I have been fighting the good fight -- I co-own the MBO with my leader, and I have a bona fide pilot which is turning out to be the model of strategic workforce planning in my opinion. Very exciting!"

At the end of this paper, Aruspex have included ideas and hints of overcoming each of the identified challenges – if you are experiencing similar challenges, these hints will help.

Helpful Business/Functional Skills

While the function of SWFP usually (but not always) exists in the Human Resources department, workforce planners themselves often come from backgrounds outside HR. In order to explore the different possible functional backgrounds of the respondents, the survey asked: "In what business/functional areas do you have skills? How helpful are they? If you do not have these skills, how helpful do you think they would be?"

The most common, most valued and most desired skills are listed in the callout at left, and they very strongly show the transition which the discipline is beginning to make from OWFP to SWFP.

Current Functional Skills	If a strength, also a valued strength
HR Data Analysis	50%
Organizational Development	45%
Core business of my organization	43%
Strategic Planning	43%
Facilitation	42%
Project Management	42%
Marketing	41%
Finance	39%
Maths/Statistics	39%
Forecasting	39%
Futuring	39%
Economics	37%
Budgeting	36%
Learning and Development	35%
HR Generalist	32%
HR Executive	30%

Respondents were asked not just which functional skills were strengths, but also which of those strengths they found most valuable to SWFP (left)

Valued Current Skills

HR Data Analysis was highly valued, and when we looked at the strong/very strong SWFP ratings, this proportion increased – 62% of this group were strong in SWFP (against 64% for the strong/very strong OWFP group), 79% of

Most Common Skills

Project Management
Facilitation
Strategic Planning

Most Valued Current Skills

HR Data Analysis
Organizational Development
Strategic Planning

Most Desired Skills

Futuring
Forecasting
Finance

those rating strong/very strong in either discipline and having strong HR Data Analysis skills valued the skills (against 50% for the group as a whole). Clearly being able to analyze and interpret data (or to have access to those skills) is critical.

Desired Future Skills

Functional Skills	I wish I had these skills!
Futuring	32%
Forecasting	30%
Finance	24%
Economics	22%
Maths/Statistics	19%
HR Executive	19%
Marketing	18%
Strategic Planning	17%
Organizational Development	12%
HR Data Analysis	12%
Core business of my organization	10%
Facilitation	10%
Budgeting	9%
Project Management	7%
Learning and Development	7%
HR Generalist	5%

Looking to the future, we look at the skills most desired, and these are markedly different than those which are current strengths – the top five most desired skills are non-HR related, and the top two are heavily focused on the future, with a clear break between these two (futuring at 32% and Forecasting at 30%) and the third most desired skills (Finance at 24%).

Note that Strategic Planning and HR Data Analysis score low on the results because so many respondents are already strong in them – respondents

were asked to focus on skills they did not already possess.

Other Skills Respondents Have or Want

As with most questions, respondents were given the option to comment freely on other skills they valued, or wanted. We found three key themes in the responses:

- Skills which are available from others - where the practitioner values the skills for workforce planning but does not believe that they need the skills for themselves as long as they are able to access others in their organization
- Humanities based and "soft" business skills such as marketing , people skills, change management
- Technical business skills, such as finance, technology

Of these, negotiation, influencing and change management skills came through most strongly, but below are actual examples of the comments provided by respondents:

Skills Support

- "Some of the skills that I have noted above as 'not needing' are particular to me. I personally have quite good general knowledge and experience, work closely with HR Exec and have very good access to in-house research, marketing and finance experts (so don't need these qualities for myself)"

- "I don't personally have all of these but I "have" them at my disposal"

Soft or Humanities Based Business Skills

"Leadership & change management skills are essential for strategic workforce planning"

- "Six Sigma Certification; SPHR, CCP"
- "Leadership & change management skills are essential for strategic workforce planning"
- "I wish I had better negotiation skills"
- "I view myself as a behavioralist -- sociology/survey research/human resources credentialing and have worked in these environments. Therefore, I am so pleased to see how naturally my blended academic and professional background serve me so well in the workforce analysis and planning venue. I only wish I could do more of this in my current role because I feel so passionate about this work"
- "Communication skills at the enterprise level (complete use of all available internal and external venues, including TV, Internet spaces, etc.)"
- "Negotiation skills across internal groups. WF planning will tap shared resources, sharing people talents and maybe tools and applications and mgrs don't want to share their top performers and pay for the headcount and capital investment (SAS applications purchased by risk management, for example)."
- "Communication / stakeholder management - need to speak in terms of the business, then people understand and see how it will benefit them"
- "Creative problem solving is a critical skill"
- "Licensed trainer for 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People' - great source of inspiration and productivity."

"Negotiation skills across internal groups, WF planning will tap shared resources, sharing people talents and maybe tools and applications and mgrs don't want to share"

Business skills related to tangibles

- "Engineering & Project Management background"
- "Information Systems background, data logic, mapping, business analysis"
- "Strategic thinking is important...that only comes with experience"
- "While I don't think math/statistical skills are needed I do believe that good technology skills would be helpful to present data in the best possible way"
- "Database design expertise is extremely useful as often data is stored across multiple businesses in different formats. The ability to understand and extract data and then go on to analyze and plan strategically is what makes a workforce planner good. Unfortunately most workforce planners are HR generalists who don't have any ability to understand the relationships

"The ability to understand and extract data and then go on to analyze and plan strategically is what makes a workforce planner good"

between different data in the organization and therefore unable to identify root causes of trends (or identify where something is not a genuine trend and simple a result of poor data collection/ extraction and storage)”

Skills we don't need

The final category of assessment of each of the functional skills was “I don't have it, and I don't need it”, and the top five responses in this category were:

1. Economics
2. HR Executive
3. Finance
4. Budgeting
5. Marketing

This is slightly in contradiction with the other findings, and reflects both the dichotomy discovered between strategic and operational planners, and the willingness of workforce planners to leverage skills such as finance from other areas of the organization. This indicates that as expected different approaches are being developed by individual practitioners.

Helpful Personal Qualities

In personal qualities we again see a dichotomy in respondents – the least desired quality (sales), was also the second MOST desired quality.

Those who were good or very good at strategic workforce planning considered themselves Adaptable, Good Communicator, Good Facilitator and Leader (equal third); those who were good or very good at operational workforce planning chose Analytical, Driven and Good Communicator.

The standout “we don't want” quality was “Opportunistic” (14% of respondents), no doubt associated with the negative political sense of the word (which involves unethical behavior rather than the true definition of “taking advantage of opportunities as they arise”). True opportunism is strongly associated with entrepreneurial ventures and so might have been expected to rate more highly.

Other qualities which were given were:

- “Patient”
- “Ability to influence others without direct control”
- “Visionary”
- “Influential”
- “Time management, convincing others to support an initiative in a matrix environment.”

Most Common Qualities

Adaptable

Good Communicator

Driven

Most Valued Current Qualities

Analytical

Resilient

Driven

Most Desired Qualities

Salesperson

Negotiator

Creative

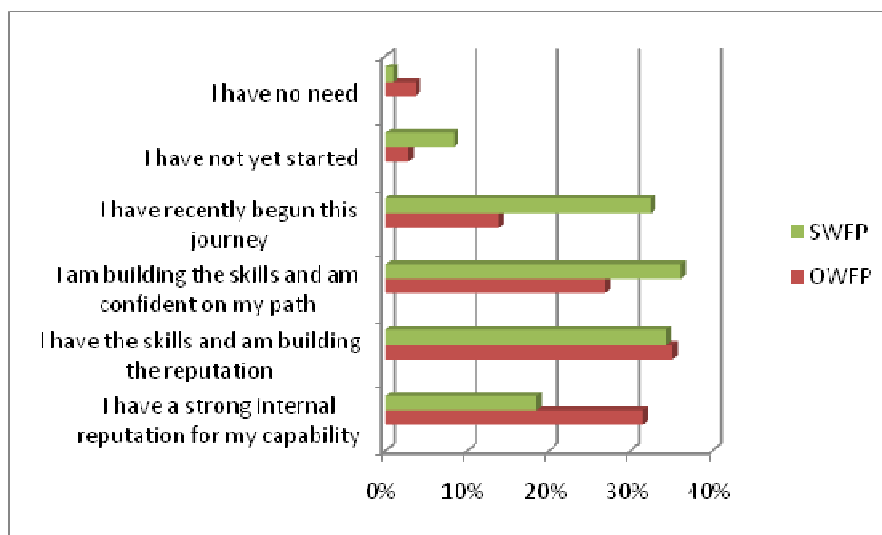
"Be outwardly passionate about this work -- push the platform forward with positive energy and keep focused on the strategy--don't get sloppy and surrender before you have shared the strategic view. The operational piece without the strategic is like a "one-handed" hand clap -- you don't hear it"

- "Accommodating, consultative, good writing skills, knowledgeable about technology/IT"
- "Tenacious, resilient"
- "Be outwardly passionate about this work -- push the platform forward with positive energy and keep focused on the strategy--don't get sloppy and surrender before you have shared the strategic view. The operational piece without the strategic is like a "one-handed" hand clap -- you don't hear it."
- "Trust from the business"
- "Networking inside and outside the organization"
- "Loyal/Optimistic"
- "Some detail vision would be useful personally and as I am aware of this shortfall, I have someone who gives me these complementary skills."

Reputation and Signals of Success

The confidence and internal reputation of the respondents again reflected a much higher degree of experience in OWFP than SWFP. 32% of respondents have recently begun the SWFP journey, but this is true for OWFP for only 14%. Conversely, 31% of respondents indicated a strong internal reputation in OWFP, as opposed to only 19% in SWFP. The function of workforce planning is definitely experiencing a transition to more of the strategic variety.

Please note these responses were not mutually exclusive – those who had "recently begun the journey" were mostly also in the "building the skills" group, but a few also fell into the "have the skills, building the reputation" group.



Of course, the ability to build an internal reputation depends not only on the characteristics of the practitioner; it also relies on the profile of the project, which can be dependent on the degree of executive support provided. Respondents were asked to indicate which signals of this support were visible in their organizations:

Signals of Executive Support	Agree
Strategic workforce planning is one of HR's top three priorities	55%
Workforce planning is integrated with business planning	46%
Senior leaders actively participate in the process	44%
Multiple days are dedicated to the process	30%
Workforce planning reports to an SVP or higher	30%
We are investing in external help	27%
We invest in the inputs (eg robust environment scanning)	26%
The project champion is at the C-Level	26%
Business people identify and explore "unknowns" and their possible future impact	25%
We are investing in dedicated software	24%
We are investing in additional people	21%
Other (please specify)	20%
The budget is increasing	8%

55% of respondents had SWFP in the top 3 priorities for HR, and the next two most popular responses also showed a solid integration with the business. However, when it comes to investment, the signs were less positive. While 27% are using consulting support, only 24% and 21% respectively are investing in tools and people to enable them to internally increase their capability, and a very low 8% were increasing their budget. While this is indicative of challenging economic times, it does not augur well for one of the top three initiatives!

The "other" responses fell into three broad categories – a lack of signals at all, signs that the organizations is struggling but beginning, support for a pilot, and full rollout signals. Some of the specific responses in these categories were:

Struggling to Begin

- "It's a struggle to move the agenda forward"
- "Engagement of government and industry associations to support business level strategic workforce planning"
- "There are very few signs at all that my organization takes this seriously. We are almost wholly reactive"
- "We are trying to raise the profile and do have support at a senior level."

Support for pilot programs

"We are building the platform and raising awareness. There is an understanding for the need to integrate with business planning and strategic direction. We are establishing the processes to deliver"

- "We have successfully completed a SWP for one business unit and are working on a second, the first was like pulling teeth to get participation outside the business unit. It was so successful the second one, people are asking if they can participate and we have 3 General Managers involved"
- "We have a culture that is risk-averse. We have to pilot first and show results to mitigate any 'fears'"
- "Pilot projects with identified org units is underway. This is to test the systems and processes and the readiness for a broader role out."
- "Via my pilot work, I am working with two key business leaders who have a wonderful reputation in our Company. Therefore, I am honored and take it as a privilege that I am moving this work forward with them at this time. Plus, my leader is very supportive of the work I am doing within the business unit, and continues to be open to hearing additional insights, etc. We are building the platform and raising awareness. There is an understanding for the need to integrate with business planning and strategic direction. We are establishing the processes to deliver"
- "The recognition that strategic workforce planning is needed and supported tends to be at lower levels within the organization due to the high turnover in the senior levels. Its the lower level management that are here for the long haul and see the pending disaster if we don't start to plan for our workforce needs in 10 years time"

Full Roll Out

- "Just finishing implementation of a global and end-to-end workforce planning and management capability"
- "Workforce planning for public sector staff is on hold with date to resume known"
- "Commitment to this process is reflective in the hiring of an external consultant"
- "We are investing in Training"
- "It is a mandate from the C suite"

While these were generally positive, one response was "Unfortunately none of the above". Many of the respondents have successfully completed pilots, or even full rollouts of SWFP, but the breadth of responses clearly indicates that most organizations are only beginning or part way along their journey to full SWFP.

Desired Assistance and Compensating for What We Don't Have

For those respondents who have identified shortfalls in their skills and knowledge, the internet is proving to be their best resource, followed closely by networking with other workforce planners, and learning from their mistakes. This is the path expected of an emerging discipline, and is reinforced by a wide variety of internal resources:

How are you compensating?	Response Percent
Surfing the web to find information	58.5%
Networking with workforce planners in other organizations	57.5%
Learning from my successes and failures	54.7%
Leveraging the HRIS team	41.5%
Teaching yourself in other ways	40.6%
Making it up as I go along	33.0%
Leveraging Corporate Strategy	32.1%
Engaging visionary business leaders	31.1%
External consultants	30.2%
Formal training	29.2%
Leveraging Finance	21.7%
Other (please specify)	15.1%
No technique in place	1.9%

There were a variety of comments about other ways in which respondents compensated for their perceived shortfalls, primarily focused on networking, internet research, workshopping, skills sharing and attending conferences. The focus was heavily on gaining and sharing knowledge and skills.

As well as leveraging available resources, making the step to SWFP can require some dedicated resources. As this list can be long, we asked respondents to indicate the top three items which would assist them:

Three things that would assist you most	Response Percent
Solid formal framework for strategic workforce planning	57.0%
Convincing the business "it's not just the numbers!"	46.7%
Dedicated strategic workforce planning software	36.4%
Better forecasts	30.8%
Dedicated resources	29.0%
Separating strategic and operational workforce planning	25.2%
Getting the skills I need	25.2%
Training	22.4%
Bigger budget	18.7%
Networking	16.8%
Other (please specify)	6.5%

The 57% who lack a formal framework are closely related to convincing the business “it’s not just the numbers”, as these two are usually the first step to moving beyond OWFP. However, the respondents also gave other key desired aids:

- “Appropriate workforce planning (rather than payroll) data”
- “Closer link between dynamic operational deployment (and forecasting) and operational and strategic workforce planning”
- “It would be great to have better forecasts and more dedicated resources etc - however we are constrained by a very tight budget. We are also a very diverse organization with a unique industry focus - much of what we do doesn't generally fit into 'off the shelf' solutions”
- “Business Performance KPIs and accountability for workforce planning goals”
- “Learning from practical and specific successful experiences (as opposed to theoretical)”
- “Budget to implement strategies”

It is clear that this is a discipline in which many practitioners are working to develop their own view, but it is interesting how low “bigger budget” ranked on the priorities list (only 18.7% of respondents). Workforce planners are clearly leveraging the resources they have to develop their approaches.

Case Studies

We selected a number of survey respondents with strengths in SWPF to share their experiences and provide their advice and guidance to other practitioners through an interview. In alphabetical order, those five case studies are presented below.

Case Study 1: Melissa Cummings, Aetna



Experience in the Core Business – at a Competitor

Like many of the practitioners of Strategic Workforce Planning, Aetna’s Head of Workforce Planning Melissa Cummings’ background is not in Human Resources – but it is also not at Aetna. Hired in from a competitor of Aetna to launch Aetna’s new Strategic Workforce Planning initiative, Melissa’s background is in running business units like underwriting – core to Aetna’s business.

Aetna is a leading US diversified health care benefits company, serving members with information and resources to help them make better informed decisions about their health care. With more than 30,000 employees across the USA, Aetna face challenging skills shortages in some key areas (such as nursing and actuaries), and are growing

strongly. In this context, Aetna are very serious about SWFP, focusing first on five key skills groups.

"Our goal is to develop tangible representations of what our future workforce needs to be, and to build and track comprehensive plans to ensure we are achieving that targeted future – this is not just a numbers game" said Cummings. "We've started to see results already. Before this project, Aetna was focused very much on the current state of the workforce – now we start at that point, but also use a view called our 'No Change Future State', and then really explore the future. With this framework, we are looking three years into the future and saying 'what do we want for our success, and how do we want to get there?' This is a comprehensive process that allows HR and the business to feel that all possibilities are being explored, and that there is buy-in on people decisions."

The key skill which Melissa has developed on her journey to SWFP is the ability to lead powerful discussion with business leaders on the future. She uses robust environment scanning and scenario planning techniques to facilitate conversations which help the business to breakthrough thinking about strategies for future workforce techniques. Being a business person herself, she has solid credibility leading these discussions, and is developing a strong reputation.

Melissa's advice to practitioners starting out is threefold: first, remember it's not just numbers – yes you need to have well chosen metrics, but real success comes in a qualitative approach; second that it can be really helpful to have an outside mentor, but don't fall into the trap of getting consultants to do the work for you; and third, most importantly – recognize that you will need new skills, but that the experience of acquiring them can be stimulating and rewarding...and fun.

Case Study 2: Pat Hartwell, B. Braun Medical



"Partnership"

Pat Hartwell is Director, Corporate Human Resources for B. Braun Medical Inc, located in Bethlehem, PA, USA. B. Braun Medical Inc. is a member of the B. Braun Group of Companies which is ranked as the 11th largest global medical device manufacturer Medical Product Outsourcing, July/August issue, 2006. With more than 36,000 employees worldwide, B. Braun manufactures and markets products to the healthcare community with operations in over 50 countries. B. Braun partners with hospitals as an established global leader in the manufacturing and sales of innovative healthcare products, medical devices and services for the delivery of patient care. In the United States, B. Braun Medical Inc.'s corporate headquarters is located in Bethlehem, PA., which is Pat's work location.

To ensure a strategic approach to acquiring and retaining talent, the VP of Corporate Human Resources and Pat began a workforce planning and development initiative. Work was initiated between the VP of Corporate Human Resources and Pat when discussing the strategic approach to acquiring and retaining talent. Their discussion led to Pat developing a presentation which addressed the macro-level and micro-level issues

affecting talent acquisition and talent retention today. The presentation was reviewed by focus group members who represented different departments including the Human Resources' management team. The members gave collective feedback that this initiative should go forward with the project, and Pat was given the "green light" by her VP. Additionally, they suggested that this workforce planning project work begin as a pilot before fully launching throughout the organization. Historically, pilots had worked for HR, and so it was obvious that a "pilot" format for this work made sense. As timing would have it, one of the manufacturing sites was in the process of workforce transformation. Historically, pilots had worked for HR, and so it was obvious that a "pilot" format for this work made sense.

This pilot exhibited the extensive partnering between the business leaders, site HR and Corporate HR. Also, it displayed the type of progressive HR work that was available and being delivered to meet the business' needs. The pilot offered the opportunity to formulate the Workforce Planning and Development Team, which was co-led by the Director of Training and Development and Pat, and comprised of members from the manufacturing site leadership, site HR, and multiple members of the Corporate HR Dept., with Co-leads of the Director of Training and Development and Pat. The work focused on the macro/micro issues of tight market for fully-skilled labor, and since the "build and they come" strategy was not a strategy they could rely upon as a team. Additionally and equally important, the manufacturing site has a visionary leader. All of these factors combined with a focus on the business direction, brought this workforce planning and development work initiative forward with great excitement and commitment.

"The quantitative is telling us we need to get going but the qualitative is how to get there"

Because of the compliance environment in which the company operates, the Workforce Planning and Development Team planned to start the course to start with an operational perspective and later bring integrated with in the strategic planning. "The quantitative is telling us we need to get going, but the qualitative is how to get there", states Pat. At the initial team meeting of team,, the business shared its overall strategy for the workforce transformation, which and this was the guide for the data collection that was needed to evaluate next steps. A strong relationship between all of the members of the team fostered easy movement throughout the process from brainstorming and forming the gap analysis to constructing a workforce profile, and developing strategies to fill gaps.

Besides the partnering with the Site leaders, HR, and the Corporate HR team, the group works with a liaison between education and business. This critical relationship has supported the overall goal by providing information that which has helped bring a greater understanding about the surrounding environment.

"This work is so much fun....I am very passionate about it....love the collaboration between HR colleagues, and the many opportunities to bring strategy to life by working closely with our business partners!"

Case Study 3: James, Global Non-governmental Organization

HR Leader Keeping it Simple

James is the internal consultant implementing strategic workforce planning at a global NCO.

James has a bachelor of economics and master of theology, but his career has been in HR in industry leaders like BP and Pepsico, with a wide range of experience in HR disciplines including succession planning, strategic planning, compensation and benefits. A single dad with a long history of volunteer work, a project like this in a non-profit organization made a lot of sense for someone who wants to make a difference in the world.

Before James joined, the organization's first attempt at serious workforce planning had been several years earlier, when they had a single dedicated person assisted by a published author in the area. The approach was very academic – like a very big, complicated spreadsheet that James believes missed the mark, even though it was leading edge thinking at the time. With 50+ countries it was tough to get data, tough to get the completion of a spreadsheet into local priorities. They had also tried to launch it worldwide in one go, which was a mistake. The initiative never took root.

Like most NGO's, this is a matrixed, consensus driven organization (not command and control). Any initiative has to be done by consensus with the various countries, so James took a much different approach. While his economics training means James is good with the numbers, he knows that the process is not a numbers game, it's an umbrella for all of your strategies in succession, learning, OD, diversity, etc – what James describes as "the whole myriad" of HR strategy. He's currently rolling out a much simpler, more qualitative and collaborative approach step by step, engaging the various geographies early, listening to their feedback and ensuring the approach works for the people on the ground. James is leveraging the business and leadership skills he has learnt through his career, and names scenario planning and forecasting growth/decline of core capabilities as the most helpful SWFP activities. But above all else, James has four key pieces of advice:

1. Keep it simple
2. Keep it simple
3. Keep it simple
4. And did I mention, keep it simple!

Case Study 4: Lacey All, Starbucks Coffee Company



Core Business of the Organization

Since 1971, Starbucks Coffee Company has been committed to ethically sourcing and roasting the highest quality arabica coffee in the world.

“The business has to be the main participants – HR owns the framework and leads the process, but for real success the business owns the action plan”

Today, with nearly 16,000 stores in 44 countries, Starbucks is the leading roaster and retailer of specialty coffee in the world.

Lacey All, Manager, Workforce Planning, became the company’s first dedicated workforce planning professional in 2006. Lacey started her career with Starbucks in Seattle working within the retail organization learning the core business. Her next move was to the US Store Operations’ performance measures team where she earned her analytical chops crunching data and churning out consumer research working on special project around the customer experience. Looking to expand her understanding of the business outside of Operations Lacey thought her next move would be organizational development – until she was asked to launch Strategic Workforce Planning.

Her first step was to develop a clear vision for what SWFP at Starbucks should be. As Lacey began researching current practices, she discovered that what many companies called strategic workforce planning was actually operational, aimed at generating short-term headcount projections. However, she did find a framework that resonated, and after training in the approach, worked with the vendor to tailor it for Starbucks – and she is still tweaking and improving the process each time.

Using pilot projects to test and tailor the approach, and to allow herself time to learn and practice, Lacey and her growing team have developed a strong reputation in the business, and as well as facilitating the process the team provide rich diagnostics and environment scanning services to the business to help to stimulate creative thinking about the future workforce.

After two years of SWFP, Lacey’s key tips are:

1. Just because it’s called “strategic” doesn’t mean it is
2. Headcount planning is necessary but won’t get you a seat at the table
3. Make sure that the business develops and owns the plan – most participants and the sponsor of each project should be in the business, not in HR
4. Engage the HR experts up front – the business’ SWFP will be the overarching guide to all of their HR Strategy, so the experts of each functional area need to be fully informed and engaged
5. Keep each engagement short and sweet
6. Do solid pre-work for the business, to maximize the value of the face to face time you have
7. Visual presentation counts – spend time making sure your materials and processes are polished

Conclusion: What DOES Make a Good Workforce Planner?

Above all else, the quality which shines through in this research is courage – Strategic Workforce Planning practitioners are implementing and championing projects which take the issues of the future workforce right to the business. They are moving beyond a focus on “getting the numbers right” and building their skills in futuring, forecasting and finance – non-traditional skills for HR. While the skills of HR were less valued, many of the respondents were succeeding from HR backgrounds, adding business and other skills to their repertoires – the wide range of skills on which practitioners are drawing is one of the key findings.

It is clear that there is also executive support for moving beyond numbers and data to more strategic activities, and that workforce planning initiatives are increasingly gaining executive focus. But they are early – more than 60% of respondents indicated they are in the skills building phase.

So from this it seems that the top three things that make a great workforce planner are:

1. Skills and willingness to engage the executive and the business, and to drive change
2. Knowing that new skills are needed, and actively seeking them
3. Leveraging the assistance of others where individual skills aren't present

In the next two years, this research indicates that great workforce planners will focus on scenario planning and forecasting growth/decline of core capabilities, as well as incorporating workforce desires and social trends into their plans. They will learn futuring and forecasting skills (and to a lesser extent, finance), and focus on developing their sales, negotiation and creative qualities. Mostly they plan to do this by networking with other practitioners, surfing the web, and learning from their own successes and failures.

It should be an exciting few years in Strategic Workforce Planning!

Aruspex Responds: Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges

Aruspex has substantial experience helping leading organizations implement Strategic Workforce Planning. In response to the obstacles identified by respondents to our research, we offer some advice on each issue – advice gathered in many years of this work. For ease of use, we've grouped the issues into themes.

If you would like more information on how Aruspex can help you implement a practical and effective approach to Strategic Workforce Planning, please contact us at aruspex@aruspex.com, or by calling any of our regional offices.

Not Enough Focus on the Future

We have too many fires to fight to focus on this

Strategic workforce planning is not a priority for us

We are not focused on the future

For a business to be sustainable, its management must have the capacity to focus on the future while capitalizing on the present. This is challenging, but essential. Workforce planning positions the organization to ensure it has the workforce in place to fulfill its financial and marketing plans and, as such, an essential process for senior managers to undertake in order to fulfill their core accountabilities—it is not separate from those accountabilities, and as such needs to be prioritized as an essential activity – and avoid some of those future fires!

Workforce Planning is future oriented; it goes against people's natural tendency, which is to keep their thoughts and actions in the time they are most comfortable in—the present. Many people are comfortable projecting to 12 months (e.g. budgeting), but beyond that is less tangible and hence more intimidating—the unknown. However it doesn't have to be; there are techniques and tools to assist in defining the future, whether or not executive focus is there.

Data Issues

We don't have the data we need

Analysis paralysis - swamped by data

There are a spectrum of challenges here that range from not enough to too much data, and very often there are issues with the quality of data.

Strategic Workforce Planning is not a Key Focus Area

Not enough people are dedicated to workforce planning

We are focusing on embedding operational planning first

We have no budget

The key is to gain executive support for the initiative, which is primarily done by focusing on educating the business leadership that there is a problem – not that there is a solution! Once you can clearly identify that future talent challenges are a risk for the business (using environment scanning, No Change Future State, and business case development to name a few), you can develop executive focus

Successful projects gain sponsorship and reinforcement from the executive that Workforce Planning is an important strategic value creation process, and that it is appropriate that the right level managers focus on it—and back it up with a process and framework that adds value to the business to ensure it's not just another form! The organization's executive must also ensure that the Workforce Planning effort is integrated with organizational strategic planning.

Lack of Capability or Tools

There is no “best practice” for us to follow

We lack the internal capability

Workforce Capability and tools

This is par for the course in an emerging discipline, and there are many tips in this research to help practitioners struggling with these issues. Aruspex has a series of whitepapers describing our framework, and hosts regular workshops to help to educate people, as well as a network of practitioners. The most important tip here, though, is remember that this is a journey, and as with all strategic change it will require some piloting and testing to develop the right approach for you and your organization. Find yourself a mentor, and be ready to grow with your process!

Dedicated Strategic Workforce Planning Tools are available on the market. See <http://www.qruspex.com> for more information on our tools and templates, or to connect with other practitioners who can share their advice.

Organizational Readiness

Engagement at the right level

Organizational readiness (including prioritizing)

Organizations are concerned that their managers have too much to do, and may claim that workforce planning takes the manager away from his or her “real” accountabilities. If this type of response sounds familiar, you may be targeting the wrong level manager and should look higher in the organization, where strategic and future-focused functions like workforce planning are more relevant – and be sure (as mentioned above), that you are educating leaders that there is a problem, not that there is a solution (in the first instance)!

In many instances, to address the busy managers' concern and capability, HR designs a form-based process to support the manager. However, completing the form often becomes the activity, rather than an aid to the process. As a result it is "another form to be filled in for HR," or "another pretty folder to put on the shelf" and becomes compliance-oriented—sometimes with the original purpose lost. As this cycle continues with various HR initiatives, the organization increasingly resists "another form to complete" and so becomes concerned whenever there is a "new" process being proposed.

The key to this is to use an approach which is not onerous on the business – rather one which educates, supports and partners with them. Keep it simple!

We are on the journey!

Congratulations! Confirmed by the findings of this research, Aruspex has long since understood that Strategic Workforce Planning is a journey that practitioners and organizations take. We recommend that you take the "evolution, not revolution" path, learning from the experience of others, selecting activities and piloting your approach so you can effectively tailor your chosen framework to your organization. Remember, as well as a journey, Strategic Workforce Planning is a menu not a prescription, and you should select the right approach for you.

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About Aruspex

The world's largest companies partner with Aruspex to plan and build their best workforce. Aruspex is the only company solely focused on strategic workforce planning, helping the world's largest companies plan and build the right workforce to meet their strategic objectives. Aruspex software analyzes internal and external workforce trends to ensure that companies are completely prepared to meet current and future business demands.

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